

Ian Samuels / from *RED CITY BLUES*

The Legend of Black and Red, Part One.

The brothers Black and Red were legends with lighthouse bright smiles, the kind who resented being born too late to ride the rails.

They came out west and on their first night in town, told everyone the story of the night they killed and ate a black cat just for getting out in front.

They'd lost their women and worked for the Man, bought their own graveyard and swore to kill anyone who fooled with them, announced their State of Blues to the world, dreamed that all the houses they'd ever slept in had burned to the ground, gone broke and ragged and hungry a few months later.

They finally pawned their knives, their chains and even their .44s after they'd shot out the window of a woman named Delia who they claimed had made them feel low.

They ate every dinner like criminals savoring a last meal and loved listening to any song that contained the words "Why don't you come on home?"

Who of All Dancers?

She goes still, a mannequin washed up at the shore of sharp-stinking nine-to-five life, surface marred by the whips of music and scorns of opium petals.

She sees him and tries to decipher the coded bumps on his shaved scalp, mysteries whispered by a leather vest or woven into a beard, the flavours of betrayal: *how* would he go about telling a lie? *What* would he choose to lie about? (Maybe something simple, like how he doesn't need the glass in hand or think about the solace at the edge of a broken window, or how his razor-wire laugh isn't performed over a cold abyss of terror.)

Stale air tells skin the story of being trapped in a dark closet, a moldering wood-paneled basement, a smoky back room with five glassy-eyed drunks and a stainless-steel pole and the velvet voice of Bobby Cray too gentle to cut through the scented memories of abandoned children.

White dress clings like the embrace of a little sister, a second flesh made out of innocence and about to shed into the teeth of a Delta beat that wandered too far north and wound up staggering here, to this bar, a sotted refugee from the ambush of winter. Razor-wire's eyes are taking up spotlight duty, a violent beam of threat and promise; shed that skin and just maybe shed that oily touch of obsession, let the thirsty music drink it down.

Johnny Rocket's *Tale of Woe*.

“Didn’t know I had a faith to lose until I lost it, rolled down into the sewers somewhere on the corner of first and third between a bottle of bourbon and a three-day coke binge that stretched all the future’s promises into a thin, bright tripwire.

“But that’s a lie.

“Even then I didn’t really notice, not until the three or four hundredth time I’d wound up still awake with lights flickering to life, band quietly packing for the open road and the last twelve or thirteen of us blinking at each other, dead-ended flotsam of consumer city wondering if we should keep running from memories we couldn’t name, if there was a place we could curl up and hide together and pretend to be friends.

“But that’s a lie.

“We could name the memories just fine any time we wanted but something stayed our tongues that instant, maybe having spent the evening in company with visitors from other worlds we once occupied, feeling there was a whetted razor of truth gliding in the silences between the smartly turned-out student types who’d made their pilgrimages here, honest-to-God house of something called “blues,” a feeling their children’s children might study in museums one day, examining the exotic re-creations of terry cloth table covers and wondering how it must have smelled, tasted, felt to be of a time when all the old canonical emotions were just on the edge of becoming copies of a copy of

a copy whispered in the minor chords of someone else's song that fades into an out-of-tune gloss on twelve bars of the human condition, or maybe we were past the edge and ours was a time of noticing the obvious, but anyway there was no pretending, really, and no friends, just necessities of the moment.

“But that's a lie.

“Truth is none of those moments were necessary, but there was a kind of beauty just around the corner of them and you could find it with one more swallow, or you could hope some young turk with a guitar would one day capture the ill-gotten talents of a crossroads ghost and hand you the meaning from a set of nimble fingers.”

